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### **STRENGTHENING BONDS: HOW COMMUNICATION ENHANCES MARITAL QUALITY**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Marriage involves great responsibility and demands mutual understanding and sacrifice between partners. In the pursuit of happiness, challenges and conflicts—particularly in communication—are inevitable. Since communication skills are among the key factors influencing marital quality, this study aimed to explore the relationship between marital quality and communication among young couples in the early phase of marriage (1 to 10 years). A total of 120 participants who had been married for 1 to 10 years volunteered to participate in this study. The instruments used were the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) and the ENRICH Communication Scale (ECS). Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using the latest version of SPSS. A Spearman's rho correlation analysis revealed a weak but statistically significant positive relationship between communication and marital quality. Additionally, the study examined the influence of gender on both variables. Mann-Whitney U tests showed no statistically significant differences between male and female participants in either marital quality or communication. However, a Kruskal-Wallis H test revealed a significant difference in marital quality across different education levels, indicating that educational background may influence marital satisfaction. The results of this study indicate that communication is positively associated with marital quality among couples in the early phase of marriage. These findings also suggest that gender does not significantly influence marital satisfaction or communication. Therefore, future research should explore other contributing factors such as communication styles, emotional intimacy, and duration of marriage. Additionally, examining the role of gender, marital dynamics, and psychological well-being may provide a deeper understanding of how communication patterns impact marital quality.

**Keywords:** Marital quality, communication skills, young couple.

## INTRODUCTION

A marriage goals for couple who enter the marriage is happiness relationship based on love until the end of life. One of the key to achieve this goal is good communication in a couple's relationship. Without good communication, established relationships will not run smoothly and create conflict in marriage relationships. In a husband-wife relationship, effective communication is important in avoiding various family problems, such as relationships conflict, poor self disclosure, and lack of understanding what couples need. Besides, good interaction and communication also contribute to improve the marital quality among couples. Positive communication behaviour such as self-disclosure, accuracy of non-verbal communication, frequency of successful communication, mutual understanding between partners, and empathy have been found to be positively associated with the quality and stability of marital relationships (Ruffieux et al., 2014).

According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2021), a newlywed couple or young couple refers to individuals who have recently entered into marriage within a specific timeframe. Meanwhile, Asila Nur Adlynd and Siti Marziah (2019), defined young couples as those who have been married for between 1 to 5 years. Lavner and Bradbury (2010) categorized couples who had been married for 1 to 10 years as being in the early phase of marriage. Linked to Erikson's developmental theory, life development in this phase is associated with the stage of intimacy-isolation, which focuses on family life. This phase involves the individual in between the ages of 20 and 35 (Harun & Hamzah, 2007). Young couples tend to experience issues involving interaction and communication. The relationships of couples that do not run well can cause couple fail to face marriage challenges, such as self-adjustment, financial management, sexual problems, care and health of children, failure to deal with conflicts and the financial issue. All this issue is related to the interaction and communication between couple which is finally contribute to divorce and separation.

The percentage of age involved in divorce, the highest percentage of divorce occurs between the ages of 30 and 34 for both gender, that is, couples who are usually within the first 10 years of marriage (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021). Thus, this article will identify how the communication skills improve marital quality of couple and carried out as an effort to understand the functionality of marriage. The findings are important to plan programs to improve marital quality and will also provide further input to develop marriage modules to enrich the marital quality among newly young couples.

Many researchers has been focus on the relationship between couple communication and marital stability (Zakaria et al., 2019). Researchers who study couples' marital quality find out that communication is one of the factors that stress marriages and indirectly affects marital satisfaction and contributes to the stability of marriage. Along with this, effective communication is the key couple intimacy and good interaction is the heart of marital quality. A study by Ramos and Leal (2021) relates communications, as one of the factors that contribute to the satisfaction of a couple's marriage and prevent divorce.

The couple who has low satisfaction in marital turn ending the marriage by divorce. The quality of the marriage will determine two effects in the couple's life, that is, whether they feel satisfied in married life or the relationship ends in divorce. It is well known that divorce not only affects the couple themselves but also all the individuals around them, especially the children. Children from divorced families experience more negative life changes than their peer, and are more likely to experience behavioral problems. This is in line with what Anderson (2014) said that children raised in parental

relationship conflict tend to see the world as an unsafe place and grow up knowing the meaning of hostility, live in depression and have a low self-concept.

Effective communication that takes place in a marriage will influence the direction of the couple's marriage and can prevent divorce. Baghipour (2010) explains that good communication will allow couples to share thoughts and feelings more intimately and avoid misunderstandings that create relationship conflicts, the meaning of communication itself is the ability to convey the meaning and message that is in a person's mind to their partner.

According to Du Plooy and de Beer (2018), communication significantly contributes to marital satisfaction. They emphasized that various forms of couple communication—such as effective interactions, mutual understanding, and constructive dialogue—play a vital role in enhancing the quality and stability of marital relationships.

Their study highlighted several key elements of effective communication in marriage: (i) expressing love verbally and non-verbally, (ii) sharing positive and constructive opinions, (iii) managing conflict through restructuring and active listening techniques, (iv) developing effective communication skills, and (v) maintaining positive communication behaviors. Effective communication is widely recognized as a cornerstone of strong and enduring romantic relationships. Numerous studies have documented how the quality of interpersonal communication between couples significantly contributes to relationship satisfaction, emotional intimacy, conflict resolution, and long-term stability (Gottman & Silver, 2015; Fincham & Beach, 2010).

According to Gottman and Silver (2015), couples who practice “emotionally intelligent” communication—characterized by mutual respect, active listening, and empathy—are better equipped to navigate disagreements and stressors in the relationship. Their longitudinal research on married couples found that the ability to engage in constructive dialogue during conflict predicted long-term marital success, while negative patterns such as criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling were strong indicators of relationship breakdown. Similarly, Markman et al. (2010) emphasized that positive communication habits, including clear expression of needs, appreciation, and shared decision-making, serve as protective factors against marital distress. Couples who regularly express gratitude and validation report higher relationship satisfaction and a stronger sense of connection. These communication behaviors reinforce emotional security, which is essential for long-term relational health.

Brown et al. (2022), found that effect of positive experienced together through emotional sharing improves the marital quality of a couple's relationship. The high quality of marital quality is positively link with experienced together among couples involving emotional sharing and on the other hand, low quality of marriage is associated with the negative effects of sharing with the partner. The low level of marriage quality causes the fragility of a relationship so that it is easy for the couple to take a solution with divorce without thinking about the effects and consequences. The communication are the main predictors of marital quality between couples. Farah Haris and Annesh Kumar (2018) proves that couple's communication affects the couple's marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction is a synonymous term that also describes the quality of marriage. According to Gottman and Gottman (2017), couples who communicate in a critical, defensive, hateful way cause the level of marital satisfaction to decrease. A study by Allendorf and Ghimire (2013) also proved that communication (in addition to satisfaction, and togetherness) affects the level of a couple's marriage. The communication factor refers to how often

the couple talks about different things, such as difficulties or household matters. This study also found that women who have communication problems in marriage tend to have low quality of marriage

There are also some researchers looking at communication patterns based on gender (Eckstein & Goldman, 2001). The way of communication and interaction between men and women literally are different. Although it is different but the positive effect of communication is the same on both genders. A study by Yoo (2020) looked at differences between gender and communication on marital satisfaction in Korea shows that the quality of communication has a positive effect on marital satisfaction for both gender groups. The couples who talk more and are satisfied with the communication have higher marital satisfaction and marital quality.

In the some culture, some of people believe that men and women communicate in different ways during interactions. This difference sometimes gives an advantage to a relationship and sometimes invites relationship conflict. According to Goldsmith and Fulfs (1999), differences in communication between men and women are not solely determined by gender, but rather influenced by other variables such as culture and patterns of social interaction. In contrast, Sarac and Sanberk (2022) found that gender significantly influences interaction behavior. Their study highlighted that positive behaviors such as offering constructive solutions, showing acceptance, and attentive listening facilitate better understanding between partners. Conversely, negative behaviors such as frequent criticism, arguments, and ineffective reactions were found to significantly predict lower marital satisfaction.

Wilson and Kiecolt-Glaser (2022) highlighted that differences in communication and interaction styles within marriage are often influenced by age and the duration of the relationship. Their findings indicated that middle-aged couples tend to use more positive and affirming language in their daily interactions, which significantly contributes to a more positive emotional climate in the relationship. In contrast, younger newlywed couples may exhibit less emotionally mature communication styles, potentially due to limited experience in managing relational stress or conflict. In addition to the use of positive language, the incorporation of humor also plays a crucial role in shaping marital communication. According to a study by Tsai et al. (2023), couples who engage in positive humorous exchanges report significantly higher levels of marital satisfaction. On the other hand, couples who lack humor in their communication tend to experience lower satisfaction in their relationships. Humorous communication not only lightens daily interactions but also serves as an emotional buffer that reduces tension, facilitates conflict resolution, and strengthens emotional bonding between partners (Tsai et al., 2023). Taken together, these findings suggest that mature and emotionally intelligent communication characterized by positive and humor is a key component of long-term marital quality. It underscores the idea that how couples communicate, not just what they say, can profoundly affect the health and stability of their relationship.

Communication is a negotiation process that gives meaning to the couple. This process involves the interaction of two parties, namely husband and wife to determine the meaning together. Because of that, effective communication involves both parties negotiating with each other. Despite that, communication is the process of negotiation of meaning between husband and wife in a relationship. Interaction will not happen if only one party is involved. On the other hand, both parties (husband and wife) interact by exchanging information with each other to determine mutual meaning. Likewise, the notion of an effective communication process requires the couple to continue refining and renegotiating mutual meaning (Eckstein & Goldman, 2001). Couple interaction and communication also happened through discussing tasks and daily work in addition to the couple's ability to convey messages about what each other likes and dislikes, especially in relation to sex (Farah Haris & Ansh Kumar, 2018).

Couples' issues and conflicts usually arise when one of the parties is unable to convey a message or communicate well to the extent that the couple misinterprets the message conveyed (Tavakolizadeh et al., 2016).

In summary, the literature strongly supports the view that effective and positive communication plays a critical role in strengthening romantic relationships. Whether through verbal affirmation, active listening, shared humor, or emotional attunement, communication serves as both the foundation and sustaining force of relational well-being. As such, developing communication skills should be a key component in interventions aimed at enhancing couple relationships.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The objective of this study was to examine the relationship between communication and marital quality among newly married young couples within the first ten years of marriage, using a quantitative research design. Additionally, the study aimed to identify differences in marital quality and communication between male and female participants, as well as to explore variations in these variables based on participants' educational level. This study involved 120 married individuals who were selected from a large sample in a study exploring the psychological aspects of close relationships. The subjects were participants who volunteered to participate in the study. The sampling technique used is a purposive sampling technique that takes into account some criteria that have been set for the selection of respondents.

### **Inclusion Criteria**

Participants must be legally married.

Participants must have been in a marital relationship for a minimum duration of 1 to 10 years.

### **Instrument**

#### **Relationship Assessment Scale**

In this study, the measurement of the level of marriage quality is using the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) by Hendrick, (1988). This instrument is a scale that measures the quality of marriage as uni dimension. The researcher chose to use the RAS instrument to avoid overlapping dimensions in the quality of marriage. The uni dimensional measurement of the quality of marriage scale is more comprehensive and conforms to the theory in addition to avoiding overlapping dimensions in the quality of marriage (Fincham & Bradbury, 1989). The RAS instrument is a self-report that has 7 items. The subject's response is based on a five-point likert scale that includes a scale of one to a scale of five. Scale 1 is for 'low satisfaction' and scale 5 for 'high satisfaction'. The total score is calculated by summing all item responses, with the exception of items 4 and 7, which are reverse-scored before inclusion in the final total. Total scores can range from 7 to 35, with higher scores meaning high of the marital quality.

#### **Enrich Communication Scale**

The Enrich Communication Scale is a sub scale of the Enrich Marital Satisfaction (EMS) measurement that measures the partner's level of satisfaction in sharing opinions and feelings. This tracking tool is

taken from the EMS customize version by Olso and Larsom (2008) which has been translated into Malay. This measurement tool focuses on the individual's pleasure when communicating with their partner or measuring the individual's perception of how well the partner is able to listen and communicate well. This measurement tool is to look at the individual's ability to communicate and understand the partner's feelings during the interaction.

This measuring tool contains 5 likert scales which are 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (not sure), 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree). This scale contains 10 items consisting of positive items (items 1, 8,9) and negative items (2,3,4,5,6,7,10). The calculation of the score for this measuring tool is by adding positive items and negative items, the calculation of positive items for scale 1 is five marks, scale 2 is four marks, scale 3 is three marks, scale 4 is two marks and scale 5 is one mark. The calculation of the negative item score is the opposite of the positive item.

**Table 1**

*Research Instrument*

Scale	No of items	Reliability Value	Example items
Relationship Assesment Scale, RAS	7	.891	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How well does your partner meet your needs</li> <li>2. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?</li> <li>3. How often do you wish you hadn't gotten in this relationship?</li> </ol>
Enrich Communication Scale	10	.865	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. It is very easy for me to express all my true feelings to my partner.</li> <li>2. When we are having a problem, my partner often gives me the silent treatment.</li> <li>3. I am very satisfied with how my partner and I talk with each other.</li> </ol>

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The participants in this study comprised 45% males and 55% females. The majority of participants (49.2%) were between 20 and 30 years old. Most had been married for 1 to 5 years, and the majority had one to two children. The household income ranged from RM1,000 to RM10,000, with a mean income of RM4,850.61. Participants' educational backgrounds varied, ranging from primary education to postgraduate (Master's) degrees. Preliminary tests of normality using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated that the data were not normally distributed ( $p < .05$ ). Therefore, non-parametric statistical tests were employed in the analysis. Specifically, Spearman's rho correlation was used to examine the relationship between Marital Quality and Communication. In addition, the Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to assess differences in communication levels across academic qualification groups, while the Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare communication scores between male and female respondents.

The results showed that there was a significant but weak positive relationship between communication and marital quality, with  $p = .224$ ,  $p < .05$ . This finding indicates that marital quality is associated with how couples communicate with one another. Participants who reported higher levels of satisfaction in their communication with their spouses also tended to report better marital quality. This suggests that effective communication contributes positively, although modestly, to the overall quality of marriage.

The Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to examine differences in marital quality between male and female participants. The results showed no statistically significant difference between the two groups ( $U = 1668.500$ ,  $Z = -0.620$ ,  $p = 0.536$ ), indicating that gender does not significantly influence marital quality in this sample. This absence of significant gender differences aligns with previous research suggesting that gender alone may not be a strong determinant of marital quality (e.g., Smith & Johnson, 2020). It implies that other factors, such as communication patterns or duration of marriage, may play a more critical role in influencing marital satisfaction. Further research could explore these variables in more depth to better understand the dynamics affecting marital quality.

A Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted to examine whether there were differences in marital quality and communication based on participants' educational levels. The results showed a statistically significant difference in marital quality across education groups,  $H(3) = 10.299$ ,  $p = .016$ , indicating that educational background may influence levels of marital satisfaction. However, the analysis for communication revealed no significant difference among the groups,  $H(3) = 4.331$ ,  $p = .228$ . This suggests that educational level does not have a substantial effect on couple communication in this study—participants with different educational backgrounds reported similar levels of communication within their marriages.

**Table 2**

*Correlation between Communication, and Marital Quality*

	Marital quality
Communication	.224

\* $p > 0.05$

**Table 3**

*Differences in Marital Quality and Communication between Male and Female Participants*

Variable	u	z	P(sig)	Interpretation
Marital quality	1668.500	-.620	.536	Not Significant
Communication	1711.000	-.398	.691	Not Significant

\* $p > 0.05$

**Table 4**

*The Difference in Marital Quality and Communication Based on Participants' Educational Level.*

Variable	X <sup>2</sup> (df)	Sig	Interpretation
Marital Quality	10.299(3)	.016*	Significant
Communication	4.331(3)	.288	Not Significant

\*p<0.05

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study align with previous research that highlights the critical role of communication in shaping marital quality and stability. As noted by Du Plooy and de Beer (2018), effective communication characterized by positive interaction, mutual understanding, and constructive dialogue significantly contributes to marital satisfaction. In the present study, a statistically significant but modest positive relationship was found between communication and marital quality. Participants who reported higher satisfaction with their communication also reported higher marital quality, supporting the assertion that communication plays a key role in sustaining marital well-being.

This result echoes the work of Brown et al. (2022), who found that emotional sharing and co-experienced affect are positively associated with marital satisfaction. Couples who regularly engage in shared emotional experiences tend to report stronger relational bonds, while low-quality communication may lead to relationship fragility and, ultimately, divorce. The implication is that effective communication can act as a buffer against marital dissolution.

Interestingly, the study found no significant differences in communication or marital quality based on gender. This supports the assertion by Goldsmith and Fulfs (1999) that differences in communication are not solely determined by gender, but are shaped by various social and cultural factors. Nevertheless, research by Sarac and Sanberk (2022) emphasizes that certain behavioral patterns such as positive problem-solving, acceptance, and active listening enhance mutual understanding, while negative behaviors like criticism and conflict can significantly reduce marital satisfaction.

Another important finding of this study relates to participants' educational levels. While a statistically significant difference was observed in marital quality across different educational groups, no such difference was found in communication. This suggests that educational background may influence how individuals perceive or evaluate their relationships, but does not necessarily translate into better or worse communication patterns. It is possible that effective communication is developed through relational experience rather than formal education.

Overall, the results of this study reinforce the growing body of literature emphasizing the importance of healthy communication in marriage. Scholars such as Gottman and Silver (2015), Fincham and Beach (2010), and Markman et al. (2010) have demonstrated that communication patterns particularly those marked by respect, emotional intelligence, humor, and empathy are strong predictors of marital success. Constructive communication allows couples to resolve conflict more effectively and express needs and emotions clearly, leading to increased intimacy and relational satisfaction.

Additionally, communication is more than the simple exchange of information. It is a continuous process of negotiating shared meaning, as Eckstein and Goldman (2001) argued. Marital interaction thrives when both partners engage actively in expressing thoughts, listening attentively, and adapting their messages to ensure mutual understanding. Couples who fail to communicate effectively are more likely to face misinterpretation, frustration, and conflict (Tavakolizadeh et al., 2016).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the present study supports the perspective that effective and positive communication is a cornerstone of marital quality. Regardless of gender or educational background, the ability to engage in emotionally attuned, respectful, and open communication strongly influences relational satisfaction. Interventions aimed at improving marital outcomes should, therefore, prioritize the development of communication skills as a central strategy. In conclusion, the results of this study indicated the importance of communication within long term relationships such as marriage. This factor is an important thing that young couples need to deal with. They tend to use a communication style that punishes, avoids and blames each other. It is recommended that a more detailed study be conducted regarding communication patterns that can be applied to couples and a study on how differences in communication patterns involving gender affect the quality of marriage. These findings suggest that effective communication contributes positively to marital quality, especially among couples in the early phase of marriage. Future research is encouraged to further explore gender dynamics, marital relationships, and psychological well-being in relation to communication patterns.

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